

Impact of Informational Social Support and Familiarity on Social Commerce Intention

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Abstract

Due to the increased popularity of social networking sites, a new platform called social commerce has emerged. Social commerce facilitates online interactions and user contributions to assist them in conducting commercial transactions. In this paper, we explore and identify factors that affect the intention to adopt social commerce. This study develops a comprehensive social commerce framework that has five key variables: Reviews and recommendations on social networking sites, customer ratings on social networking sites, trust on social networking sites, brand familiarity, and social commerce platform familiarity. Data were obtained from a survey of 310 consumers and were analyzed using Partial Least Squares PLS. The results indicate that reviews and recommendations on social networking sites, customer ratings on social networking sites, trust on social networking sites, and brand familiarity have a positive and direct influence on social commerce intention, while social commerce platform familiarity is not significant. This study contributes to consumer behavior theory by applying predictors of intention to social commerce for traditional e-commerce sites. The results also help e-commerce practitioners to improve their use of social tools.

Keywords: Reviews and recommendations, Customer ratings, Trust, brand familiarity, Social commerce platform familiarity, Partial Least Squares, Social Commerce

Introduction

The Social media represent one of the most transformative impacts of IT on business (Todri, 2014). Social media empowered by Web 2.0, enable individuals to communicate, collaborate in vast and international scale (Sigala, 2015). Social commerce emerged as new form of e-commerce involves using social media which support social interactions and user contributions to assist commercial activities (Wang & Zhang, 2012). The popularity of social commerce in areas such as social network sites can be considered as an example of the branches (Liang et al., 2011).

Social commerce can be defined as “an evolution of Web 2.0 of online commerce, allowing greater interactivity and participation of and among customers by means of blogs, wiki systems and sharing of articles written by its own community members” (Sturiale & Scuderi, 2013). S-commerce is transforming the role of customers into active transaction players by empowering them to participate in the marketing, selling, comparing, curating and buying of goods in online marketplaces (Shin, 2013). Social commerce as new paradigm has brought new stage of innovation to the business world by transforming the traditional way of transaction and value generation. Customers have become able to establish contacts more quickly through new forms of interactivity by Web 2.0 (Sigala, 2015), they can generate content and share it with other friends, members of communities of social networking sites.

The impact of social media on the market can be seen when electronics retailers provide more opportunities to interact with consumers (Shin, 2013). Social commerce facilitates ratings and

reviews, recommendations, and consumers' referrals with the help of the web and social media. Ratings and reviews will enable customers to see their friends review. This will help them in the decision-making process of buying. Brand reputation can affect the feedback obtained from the reviews (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Orders also strongly affect the customers' behavior as a source of information. Participation in online communities with the exchange of information is the most important reason is to join the communities. This has a direct impact on customer trust.

Complexity in online environment causes purchase avoidance; however, familiarity with the platform enhances customers understanding of the shopping process and reduces the intricacy of decisions (Gefen, et al., 2003a). Recently, Van Der Heide and Lim (2015) indicated that users who are familiar with a platform are more likely to rely on generated contents by their peers for their online purchases rather than customers who are unfamiliar. Accordingly, Martínez-López, et al., (2015) indicated that familiarity with a recommendation system enhances perceived ease of use, intention to use recommendation system, and purchase intention.

This study aims to investigate the factors affecting on social commerce intention. In view of the above discussion, this research is conducted with two main objectives. Firstly, is to examine the relationship of informational social support with trust on social networking sites. Secondly, is to identify the effect of trust on social networking sites, Brand familiarity, and social commerce platform familiarity on users' social commerce intention.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Social support is also widely being offered through social media platforms, such as blogs, Facebook groups and online support groups; even though in other areas like public health, it is more related to loneliness and coping with stress. Schaefer, et al., (1981) indicate that people need both intangible and tangible support when they are under health stress. Since virtual interactions on social media platforms are often relied on messages, online social support which may help social media users is usually intangible in nature, social support includes informational support and emotional support (Huang, et al., 2010).

Informational support refers to providing messages, in the form of recommendations, advice, or knowledge, which could be helpful for solving problems (Taylor et al., 2004)

Emotional support refers to providing messages that involve emotional concerns such as caring, understanding, or empathy (House, 1981; Taylor et al., 2004). In particular, emotional support involves listening and showing sympathy or trust (Taylor et al., 2004).

All in all, these two types of support are the primary targets for investigating social support in virtual communities. When social support, no matter informational support or emotional support, existed in a social network, and was transferred by users in the form of messages, it would be a natural for community members to share commercial information and recommendations as an extension of their sharing of other supportive information. The frequent sharing of supportive information can also enhance friendship and trusts among users, which may further increase the intention to conduct commercial activities. Thus we can derive a linkage between social support and the intention to conduct social commerce. (Liang et al., 2011, p. 72).

Informational Social Support

The ongoing fierce competition among companies has been responsible for a significant change in the marketplace in terms of product and service differentiation. This study adopts the premise that, to reduce this apparent discomfort in choosing a product or service, consumers engaged in online purchases are willing to strongly rely on informational social support from other individuals to clarify their decisions. In Duan, et al., (2008) words, such informational support may

have a positive impact in the decision-making process, as there are clear evidences that people put a significant weight on third-party opinions.

Essentially, Chen & Shen (2015), and Bai et al. (2015) posit informational social support as a type of resource - knowledge - available and provided from one person to another in the context of both formal and informal groups that may enhance relationships and help the involved subjects. Broadening the concept, online informational social support can be stated as any kind of user-generated content exchanged in online social interactions by one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many users, with the clear goal of sharing experiences and opinions, advising a person with regard to an issue, supporting a decision, promoting self-education, influencing awareness, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, intentions, beliefs, and behaviors towards a situation, object, person, product or brand (Bai et al., 2015)

Moreover, social support is believed to predict another similar construct: Informational social influence, which is defined by literature as one's behavior of observing the experience of a third-party in his/her social network before deciding to perform an intention such as buying a product (Kim & Park, 2013). Hence, through informational social support, consumers become more knowledgeable and confident to actually behave purchase intentions.

Social commerce information seeking is a customer's endeavor for acquiring information regarding a product/service/e-vendor from available resources on SNSs—such as reviews, ratings, and recommendations in online communities—to optimize her purchase decision. Social commerce information seeking are mainly conducted through three channels of information (Hajli & Sims, 2015), including: Forums and communities are places to share information and gain knowledge (Chen, et al., 2011).

Reviews and Recommendations

Online consumer reviews are evaluations of a product, generated by peers, on the website of a company or a third party platform (Nambisan, 2002). Many retailers, such as Amazon.com or eBay.com encourage users to post a review about the products they purchase and share it with their peers (Huang, et al., 2011). The reviews have the potential to add value for other interested buyers (Heinonen, 2011). Aside from peer-generated reviews, reviews offered by a third party, such comparison websites is another form of worth-of-mouth (Aiken & Boush, 2006). Customer reviews and recommendations are key features of current business to consumer websites (Hajli, et al, 2017). Hajli, et al, (2017) if the trustors (customers) hold high trusting belief on a trustee (platform), they will have a high level of willingness to depend on the trustee. Thus, we propose

H1A: Reviews and recommendations on social networking sites have a positive impact on the trust on social networking sites.

Customer Ratings

Ratings are quantitative evaluations of the quality of goods and services. Ratings are often both transparently individual, where the rater is identified by their online username, and aggregated across all of the ratings that have been provided. Many retailers, such as Amazon.com or eBay.com encourage users to post a review about the products they purchase and share it with their peers. The reviews have the potential to add value for other interested buyers (Heinonen, 2011). Aside from peer-generated reviews, rating/reviews offered by a third party, such comparison websites are another form of worth-of-mouth (Aiken & Boush, 2006). Thus, we propose

H1B: Customer ratings on social networking sites have a positive impact on the trust on social networking sites.

Trust and Purchase Intention

Trust in general refers to a reliance on someone or something to act in a specific manner, when there is some uncertainty regarding these actions (Gefen et al. 2003b). Trust has been consi-

dered as an important factor in building and maintaining a successful relationship (Morgan and Hunt 1994). The effect of trust in predicting the use of online services such as online communities (Posey et al. 2010) and e-commerce (Fang et al. 2014) has been intensively studied in IS literature.

We will consider the effect of trust in the social commerce context from two perspectives: trust toward members and trust toward website (Turel & Gefen 2013). In this study, trust toward website is defined as an individual's perception of the social commerce website as a reliable place to conduct purchasing and participating behaviors. The relationship between trust toward a website/vendor and customers' behaviors/intentions to use the website has been strongly established in the literature (Shen, 2012). Hence, we contend that:

H1: Trust toward social commerce website would increase users' social commerce intention.

Familiarity with Brand and Social Commerce Platform

Customers' familiarity with novel technologies has always been critical for online interactions and firms success (Gefen et al. 2003c). Previous research has intensively investigated the role of familiarity with brand or product/service in users' perceptions, such as purchase intention (Chen & Teng, 2013). However, the effect of familiarity with the online platform on customers' perceptions would benefit from further investigation (Lim & Van Der Heide, 2015). Familiarity in general is the "current and/or past use, or knowledge obtained by attending some form of instruction or through readings on the topic" (Liberatore & Titus, 1983, p. 964). Accordingly, familiarity with online platform is the degree to which a consumer comprehends the Website procedures (Gefen et al. 2003c) for instance, familiarity with search engines of a website and interaction channels with peers. Familiarity differs from trust, since "trust reduces social complexity relating to future activities of the other party, [while] familiarity reduces social uncertainty through increased understanding of what is happening in the present" (Gefen et al. 2003c, p. 63).

Users' understanding of contents and knowledge of the platform enhances information seeking on web sites (Choo, et al., 2000). This understanding along with the continuous engagement in channels of information seeking, such as communities/forums, enhances users' skills and expertise about the different aspects and tools of a specific online platform (Hajli, et al, 2017). For instance, users who actively seek for information about a product/service in different channels, such as reviews and e-vendors forums, become familiar with searching tools, the rating policies, contents of recommendations, and the purchasing process (Hajli, et al, 2017). Thus, we propose:

H2: Brand familiarity would increase users' social commerce intention.

H3: Social commerce platform familiarity would increase users' social commerce intention

The proposed research model is shown in figure 1.

Methodology

Research Instrument

To test the hypotheses we developed measurements for the constructs. Wherever possible, the measurement items were taken from the literature. We followed the three steps proposed by Moore and Benbasat (1991) for instrument development. Trust on social networking sites was measured as a second order formative construct, since its two dimensions do not have to covary and the trust on social networking sites is calculated by the weight sum of these two dimensions (Hajli, et al, 2017). However, we also tested the model with trust on social networking sites being reflective; the results regarding the significance or the sign of path coefficients stayed the same. We also considered brand familiarity and social commerce platform familiarity as reflective construct.

Five-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" were used to measure all items in the survey. A review questionnaire pilot test was carried out through a universi-

ty professors, both for the selected methodology and for the scales selected from the scientific literature, to ensure content validity and suitable wording of all the questions. This process was carried out using personal interviews, by modifying some of the proposed scales and by adapting others to our objective. Afterwards, the questionnaire was divided into three different sections: 1) assessment questions with the aim of confirming the subject's interest and coherence; 2) questions related to the research behavioral model; and 3) questions to gather socio-demographic data for use as control variables to ensure that empirical results were not due to covariance between variables.

The initial questionnaire was piloted with a sample of 25 undergraduate and postgraduate students from a university in May 2018. The design focused on assessing and refining the survey to check the acceptance level, dimensionality, reliability and validity of the proposed scales. After all the relevant tests were performed and the relationships and scales set out were verified, we evaluated the proposed model.

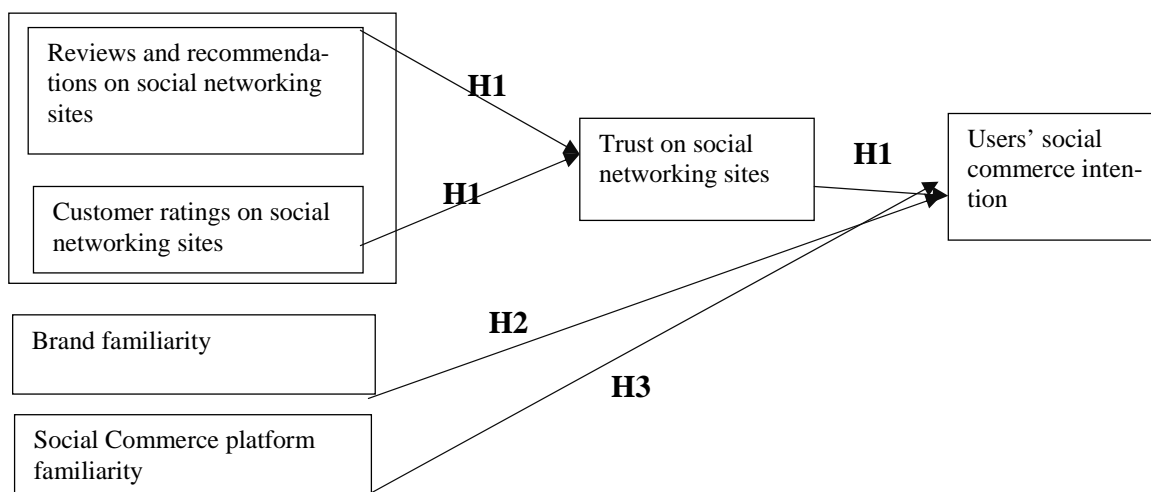


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

Data Collection

Data were gathered between June and July 2017 via an online questionnaire to social commerce customers. The questionnaire was linked to an e-commerce site selling mobile accessories. The site has social tools such as forums, product reviews, ratings and comments. The Qualtrics web survey tool was used to build and distribute the questionnaire. Users could answer the questionnaire via a link embedded at the start of the buying process. Participation was voluntary, and there was no reward system to encourage certain profiles. A gentle reminder message encouraged users to take part in the questionnaire, explaining its purpose within the academic research being conducted. Screening questions were included at the start of the process to discourage users who had not previously bought anything on the website. All incomplete questionnaires were also deleted.

In total, 390 visitors to the site went to the questionnaire and 310 submitted it. This yielded a completion rate of 79%. Among the 310 respondents, 160 were between 18 and 30 years old, 70 were between 30 and 40, 60 were between 40 and 50 and, 20 were above 50. More than 70 respondents had a bachelor's degree. 67% responds were the males whereas 33% were females. All responds have mix activity as showed in table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	207	67%
Female	103	33%
Age range		
From 18 to 30	160	52%
From 30 to 40	70	22%
From 40 to 50	60	19%
Above 50	20	07%
Education Level		
Primary and Secondary Studies	50	16%
Bachelors level	160	52%
Postgraduate level	75	24%
Other	25	08%
Activity		
Unemployed	20	06%
Student	70	22%
Employed by others	110	35%
Self employed	60	19%
Others	50	16%

Data Analysis

To analyze our data, we adopted a confirmatory approach using the PLS method. PLS has been used extensively in theory testing and confirmation. It is also an appropriate approach for examining whether relationships might or might not exist, and thus, it is useful in suggesting propositions for later testing (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, PLS relies on a smaller sample size for validating a model than do other structural equation modeling techniques (Chin, 1998). PLS-Graph version 3.0 was used to analyze the measurement and structural models.

Measurement Model

To validate our measurement model, we examined assessments of content, discriminant, and convergent validity. The content validity of our survey was established from the existing literature, and our measures were constructed by adopting constructs validated by other researchers. Further, we employed a partial least squares (PLS) graph 3.0 to perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and to determine the scope of the measured items (see Table 2).

Consequently, six factors were classified. All factor loadings were above the recommended 0.5 cut-off and were statistically significant (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). We examined the internal validity of the measurement model by calculating the composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's alpha, α (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All CRs were above the cut-off of 0.6 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The AVE of each measure extracted was equal to or greater than the 50% variance, indicating an adequate internal validity (see Table 2). To assess the discriminant validity, we used Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, where the square root of the AVE associated with a particular construct must be greater than its correlations with other constructs. Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics and inter-correlation matrix. According to the estimates presented in Table 3, each square root of the AVE (diagonal elements) was sufficiently greater than the corresponding off-diagonal elements, and, therefore, the measures represented discriminant validity.

Table 2. Measurement items and confirmatory factor analysis and reliability

Constructs	Measured items	Cross loading	t-Value	CR	AVE	α
Reviews and recommendations on social networking sites	Reviews and recommendations are more reliable on social networking platforms.	0.921	91.491	0.951	0.928	0.967
	Online users' reviews and recommendations are helpful for customers to buy product from social networking sites.	0.930	46.118			
	Online users' reviews and recommendations enhance the customers' trust on social networking sites.	0.918	87.718			
	I trust more on social networking sites that have online users' reviews and recommendations.	0.914	23.991			
	Online users get confused after reading lots of reviews and recommendations on social networking sites.	0.924	29.321			
Customer ratings on social networking sites	Good customer ratings by other members are likely to have a high level of trust social networking sites.	0.941	67.528	0.916	0.897	0.975
	Customers rely more on other customer's ratings to make purchase decision from social networking sites.	0.946	75.131			
	Good ratings of a product affects the consumer's intention while considering any product or service;	0.903	66.246			
	Online users get confused after watching lots of ratings on social networking sites.	0.915	75.963			
	Customer ratings help customers to find a reliable information about social networking sites.	0.894	71.846			
Brand familiarity	Consumers' level of familiarity with brand is likely to increase users' social commerce intention.	0.869	45.095	0.954	0.921	0.988
	I am more willing to familiar	0.936	51.784			

	products from social networking sites.					
	I always buy familiar brands from social networking sites	0.919	58.682			
	I prefer social networking sites to get new updates about all familiar brands.	0.891	54.987			
Social Commerce platform familiarity	I am familiar with searching for any product from familiar social networking sites.	0.903	6.254	0.947	0.838	0.948
	I prefer to buy from social networking sites because I familiar how to surf from those sites.	0.895	8.254			
	I am more willing to products from my familiar social networking sites.	0.845	27.324			
	I am familiar with inquiring about product ratings on my familiar social networking sites.	0.914	21.841			
Trust on social networking sites	Promises made by social networking sites are likely to be reliable.	0.984	44.257	0.975	0.866	0.965
	I do not doubt the honesty of social networking sites.	0.921	72.589			
	Based on my experience with social networking sites, I know it is honest.	0.927	69.214			
	Based on my experience with social networking sites, I know they care about users.	0.897	64.875			
Users' social commerce intention	I am willing to buy the products form the social commerce website.	0.958	91.365	0.964	0.903	0.987
	I am willing to recommend a product that is worth buying to my friends on the social commerce website	0.978	84.128			

Self-reported data on two or more variables collected from the same source have the potential to lead to common method variance. Thus, to deal with the issue of common method bias, we performed Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). If a high level of common method variance were to be present, entering all of the variables together would result in one factor accounting for a majority of the variance. In this study, an exploratory factor analysis resulted in eight factors

with eigen-values greater than one (table 3), the variance explained ranged from 5.952% to 91.557% of the total. The results did not indicate that a single factor structure accounted for most of the variances, suggesting that common method bias was not a concern in the data.

Table 3. Correlation and descriptive statistics

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6
Reviews and recommendations on social networking sites	0.951					
Customer ratings on social networking sites	0.491	0.912				
Brand familiarity	0.518	0.345	0.899			
Social Commerce platform familiarity	0.197	0.218	0.874	0.981		
Trust on social networking sites	0.548	0.298	-0.097	0.487	0.948	
Users' social commerce intention	0.480	0.461	0.369	0.568	0.528	0.967
Mean	5.328	5.246	6.397	4.453	5.691	6.544
S.D.	1.456	1.238	0.941	0.997	1.369	1.987
EV	6.332	3.459	2.787	1.074	4.545	3.891

Note: Diagonal elements in the “correlation of constructs” matrix are the square root of average variance extracted (AVE). For adequate discriminant validity, the diagonal elements should be greater than the corresponding off-diagonal elements

Results

Hypotheses Testing

The overall model fit was measured using Wheaton, et al.'s (1977) relative/normed chi-square (χ^2/df), yielding a satisfactory value of (χ^2/df), = 2.841, which is below the recommended threshold of 3 (Kline, 2011). Moreover, all factor loadings were statistically significant ($p=0.000$). The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.951, and the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.913; thus, both were above the suggested cut-off of 0.9 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR=0.061) yielded a favorable value in relation to the accepted threshold of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which indicates the amount of error in the model, was 0.054; such a value indicates a good model fit rather than an excellent fit (with a recommended cutoff of 0.06) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011). Based on the (χ^2/df , GFI, CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR, the structural equation model shows a good fit (table 4).

Table 4. Structural equation modeling results

Goodness of fit of the model	value	Hypotheses	Standardized regression weight (β)	Supported vs. not supported
χ^2/df	2.841	H1A	0.654***	Supported
Chi-squared	435.127	H1B	0.521***	Supported
GFI	0.951	H1	0.789***	Supported
CFI	0.913	H2	0.154**	Supported
RMSEA	0.054	H3	0.042	Not supported
SRMR	0.061			

Note: ***Indicates $p < 0.001$. ** Indicates $p < 0.01$.

The structural equation model was tested using the statistical software PLS-Graph version 3.0, and results are presented in Table 5. Based on the results, the antecedents of trust on social networking sites were Reviews and recommendations on social networking sites (stand. $\beta = 0.654$; $p < 0.001$), and Customer ratings on social networking sites (stand. $\beta = 0.521$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, the results support the following hypotheses: H1a, and H1b. The relationship between trust on social networking sites and users' social commerce intention is positive and highly significant (stand. $\beta = 0.789$; $p < 0.001$); thus, H1 is accepted. Contrary to our predictions, brand familiarity did not exhibit a strong predictive power in its relationship with the dependent variable (users' social commerce intention), but this relationship is deemed to be significant (stand. $\beta = 0.154$, $p < 0.01$); thus, H2 is accepted. However, the relationship between social commerce platform familiarity and users' social commerce intention was revealed to be weak and non-significant, thus rejecting H3 (stand. $\beta = 0.042$, not significant).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effect of informational social support along with trust on social networking sites, brand familiarity and social commerce platform familiarity on users' social commerce intention. The results provide strong support for some of hypotheses. Empirical results identify two distinct and valid components of trust on social networking sites, and brand familiarity reveal significant influence on users' social commerce adoption. Whereas, social commerce platform familiarity doesn't show any influence on dependent variable (shown in figure 2).

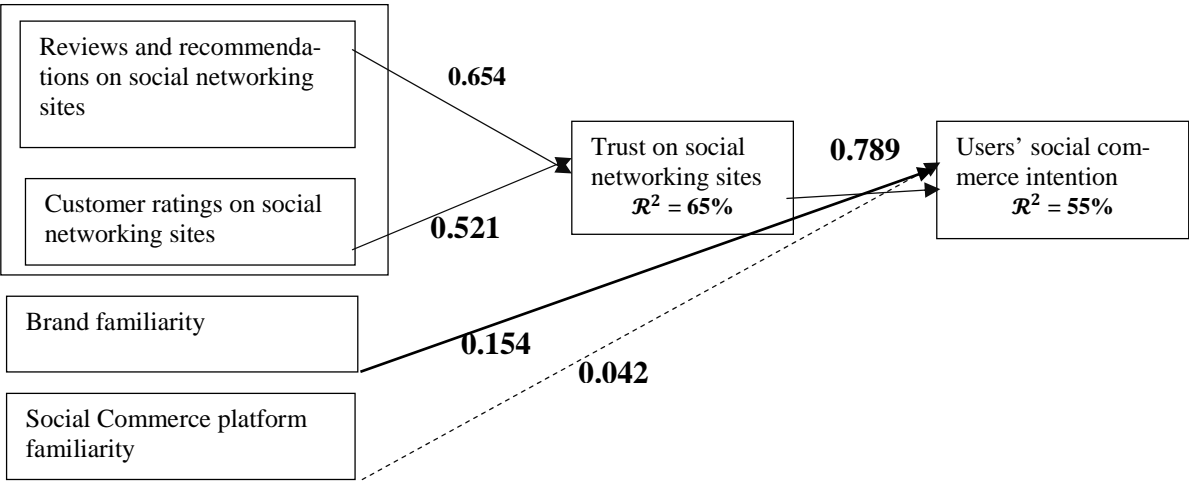


Figure 2. Result of SEM analysis

According to Hajli (2015), social commerce increases the willingness to buy by creating opportunities for making groups, collaboration, information exchange, and membership in consumers. Thus, providing social commerce platform can lead to more desired purchases that are one of the main objectives of the economy. According to Geffen and Straub (2004), trust is certainly one of the key elements in internet commerce and social commerce. When, laws and regulations are not enough, customers try to reduce their social unreliability by relying on trust and familiarity. Thus, people try to increase their information about a product or service by participation in groups and communities or reviewing views and customer's opinion. Consequently, the customers trust increases. Our results show that reviews and recommendations on social networking sites, and customer ratings on social networking sites has a positive and highly significant on trust on social networking

sites, which in turn a significant influence users' social commerce intention. Informational social support found in product ratings, reviews, recommendations, referrals, and posts has become a valuable source for potential consumers trust on social networking sites, as it definitely helps them during the purchase process. Informational social support has a great potential to drive consumers to better product and brand evaluations, reduce consumer perceived-risk, enrich the decision-making process, facilitate information searching and processing as well as setting expectations. Customer's reviews and recommendations have a strong influence on customers' behavior as a strong source of information. In addition, customer ratings on social networks can also affect willingness of customers to buy was confirmed. Consumer trust more on each other and non-company sponsored information which increase their intention to buy from social networking sites.

Our results also show that's brand familiarity did not exhibit a strong predictive power in its relationship with the dependent variable (users' social commerce intention), but this relationship is deemed to be significant. A well-known brand provides better recall and lowers the level of risk perception, which may increase attitude and purchase intentions toward the brand from social networking sites. Brand familiarity decreases the perceived risk of intimate shopping, while also increasing attitudinal and behavioral responses toward the brands.

Finally, our results do show the relationship between social commerce platform familiarity and users' social commerce intention was weak and non-significant. Social commerce platform familiarity may make purchasing convenient as customers are familiar with social commerce platform interface but it does not affect social commerce intention. Unfamiliar platforms can decrease the customers' confidence which can be enhanced with repeat uses of interface, but customer do surf through social networking sites for getting product information. Our results do not show any significant relationship between social commerce platform familiarity and users' social commerce intention.

Study Limitations

This study has a few limitations that need to be pointed out and recognized when interpreting the results. First potential limitation, current study used a cross-sectional study, and we analyzed drivers and deterrents of social commerce use at a single point in time. Future studies can examine the longitudinal behaviors and analyze whether these deterrent and drivers may change over time.

Second, as the data was collected by self-report method, common bias may be a problem of the study which possibly cause measurement errors that misleading conclusions.

Third, survey of the research was distributed through social media which may lead to participant's bias and limit the diversity of the sample.

Finally, in IS context, intentions have been studied as an appropriate proxy to analyze the actual behaviors (Davis 1989); therefore, we also measured intentions in our study instead of users' actual behaviors. Future studies should examine whether there is any gap between intentions and behaviors of social commerce users.

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